city of CINCINNATI
Interdepartment Correspondence Sheet

June 26, 2020

FOR YOUR INFORMATION MEMO

TO: Mayor and Members of Council

FROM: Patrick A. Duhaney, City Manager

SUBJECT: Converting Stretch of Plum Street to Pedestrian Plaza

On Wednesday, June 24, 2020, City Council passed item #202000829, a Motion to establish a pedestrian plaza on Plum Street between Eighth and Ninth streets by closing this section of roadway to vehicular traffic. The aim is to preserve the mural recently painted in front of City Hall.

The request to close this section of Plum Street raises several issues and concerns that should be addressed before moving forward with implementation. Key issues and concerns include the following:

- **EXISTING BUSINESS OPERATIONS:**
  - *Tow Truck Business:* The existing auto repair business at the corner of Eighth Street and Plum Street accesses its garage bays via Plum Street. Tow trucks and delivery trucks also back into the garage bays utilizing multiple lanes of Plum Street in order to make pickups and deliveries that are a vital part of the business's operations. These garage bays cannot be accessed from Eighth Street. Alternative measures to address the business impacts of closing this stretch of Plum Street need to be identified.

  - *Private Parking:* There is a parking garage used by residents and the auto repair business that would be affected by the implementation of the pedestrian plaza. Currently, the only access to this garage is via Plum Street. An alternative access for use of the parking garage needs to be identified.

- **PUBLIC ALLEY ACCESS:** Privately-owned properties abut Weaver Alley, which runs from east to west between Plum Street and Elm Street. If Plum Street is closed, the alley will need to be closed as well. The closure would necessitate alternative accommodations for access, sanitation, and other loading/unloading activities that rely upon this alley.

- **TRANSIT:** Metro has existing bus routes that run along Plum Street. This includes one route that features a bus stop in front of City Hall. Moving forward with the pedestrian plaza will require coordination with the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) to re-route these existing services.

- **TRAFFIC VOLUME:** The Plum Street corridor is a southbound connection to the Duke Energy Convention Center, the Sixth Street Expressway, and U.S. Route 50, which carries 5,000 vehicles per day (Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.) and 500 vehicles per hour during evening peak times (weekdays from to 3 to 6 p.m.). Without further study, the full impact of traffic diversion resulting from the closure of this connection is unclear and it may lead to significant off-site problems.

- **CONNECTIVITY:** The closure of Plum Street between Eighth and Ninth streets will require re-routing southbound traffic to other streets in the Central Business District grid. Modifications to adjacent streets in the network such as Central Avenue will be necessary to handle the additional vehicular traffic. The changes to the network will have a significant financial impact and result in a loss of on-street parking.

- **PUBLIC FORUM:** The proposed permanent street closure may result in the expansion of the public forum in front of City Hall. This will likely result in additional management and operational expenses.

- **LEGAL CONCERNS:** If the permanent street closure cuts off neighboring property owners' existing access without their prior consent, it could give rise to legal claims, including claims that the City has taken their property rights.

To address the above issues and concerns, as well as others that may later be identified, the Department of Transportation and Engineering (DOTE) intends to follow the permanent street closure process approved and filed by City Council in 2005 (attached). This process establishes detailed guidelines for the implementation of street closures. The first two steps in the procedure are irrelevant to this request; however, the remaining steps set forth a precedent for addressing the various potential issues that arise in connection with a street closure. This process would also include review and approval of the City Planning Commission as per Article VII, Section 5, of the Charter.

If the above process successfully addresses the issues and concerns outlined above and concludes that the street closure is feasible, an ordinance of City Council will be necessary to officially approve the closure of the street and to appropriate the funds needed to implement the required street closure improvements, as well as the funds to maintain and repair the existing street mural, including any damages that occur due to utility repairs.

Importantly, there are no funds in the Fiscal Year 2021 budget for cleaning and maintaining this section of roadway as a pedestrian plaza and no funds for maintaining and repairing the mural. There are also no funds to install the physical improvements necessary to close the street, which include, at a minimum, traffic signal timing modifications, the installation of new signage, and the installation of a permanent barricade e.g. bollards. These changes are expected to cost approximately $25,000, exclusive of the cost to clean and maintain the mural.

Aside from installing a mere barricade, City Council may also wish to investigate a more comprehensive solution that would convert the closed street space into a formal public square in which the mural could be recreated and preserved for posterity. Such improvements would require additional research, planning, and funding.

Finally, DOTE's research for sealers has provided no real options. In general, clear sealers are for concrete surfaces and most products stipulate they can be used on unpainted surfaces only. Research indicates the best results are achieved when pre-treating a roadway before it is painted; however, pre-treatment was not conducted for this mural. The options for successfully sealing the mural are very limited. Again, the most common product available is a clear concrete driveway sealer, but it is not recommended that the product be used on painted surfaces.

Attachment

cc: John S Brazina, Director, Transportation and Engineering